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TALLINN, Estonia (AP) - Presidents of the three Baltic republics urged Western nations Wednesday not to put their fledgling countries on the slow track to NATO membership. The three former Soviet nations in recent weeks have expressed concerns that they are being given lower priority in regard to NATO than other East European countries.

The Baltic presidents made their appeal at the conclusion of a one-day summit at Jurmala, a resort on the Latvian coast. "The criteria for admission to the North Atlantic Alliance needed to be equal for all perspective members," they said in a joint statement. "Europe should have no zones of diminished security."

In discussing near-term NATO membership, Western countries including the United States have tended to focus on Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, leaving out the Baltic States. In Washington last week, the House International Relations Committee approved legislation deleting references to Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia and Ukraine as possible candidates for NATO membership. The legislation requires further action by the House National Security Committee.

Some Baltic analysts have perceived the Western stance as a concession to Russia, which has voices especially strong objections to NATO membership for former Soviet republics. The Baltic states have said they regard eventual NATO membership as the best security guarantee against what they consider an unpredictable and potentially belligerent Russia.

"I should like to warn against giving the impression that the West is less interested in the security of other regions," Estonian President Lennart Meri told a NATO conference in Munich over the weekend. "The Atlantic Alliance cannot allow a security vacuum," he said.

During the Wednesday summit, the Baltic leaders also formally inaugurated the Baltic Peacekeeping Battalion, or BALTBAT, a pan-Baltic military force designed to take part in United Nations peacekeeping operations. The Baltic republics began putting the force together over a year ago. Several joint training exercises already have been held. In addition to possible peacekeeping roles, officials say that BALTBAT\ is also intended to demonstrate the ability and resolve of the Baltics to integrate into European and international security structures like NATO.

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On February 8 the Lithuanian Court in Vilnius has decreed that former national leader,Vytautas Landsbergis, whom NYTimes has described as "heir of the Lithuanian intelectual aristocracy," , is guilty spreading unfounded vile rumors about the Prime Minister of Lithuania Adolfas Slezevicius. Mr.Landsbergis suggested that the prime minister has received a $200,000 bribe to privatize so called "Literary coffee house" in the center of Vilnius, for minimal price.

Mr. Landsbergis was fined to pay Mr.A.Slezevicius 6,000 litas. Mr.Landsbergis, now opposition leader, at this time is traveling. After revisiting Japan he is expected in Chicago February 12 .